DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 225 EA 020 211

AUTHOR Klauke, Amy
TITLE Magnet Schools. ERIC Digest Series Number EA 26.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 88
CONTRACT OERI-R-88-005
NOTE 3p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publication Sales, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, OR 97403 ($2.50 handling charge per request).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; *Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; Individualized Education Programs; *Magnet Schools; *Nontraditional Education; *School Choice; *School Desegregation; School Effectiveness; Tokenism; Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

In order to facilitate the transition to a multiracial community and to meet the prevailing desire for academic excellence, magnet schools have arisen in urban areas throughout the country. These schools meet racial quotas through voluntary enrollment and open access, promote integration through cooperative learning practices, emphasize personal goals rather than competition, and facilitate individualized instruction. As a result, they improve minority achievement without hurting white achievement, and challenge the assumption that standardization is the most equitable system. Magnet schools are criticized, however, for undermining the concept of fairness through standardization and for tokenism, since they draw only the best students and leave most minority students worse off than before. Magnet schools must therefore appear attractive but not elitist by appealing to interest rather than ability, and diverse but not second-rate by providing sound criteria and objectives. To avoid tokenism, a broad array of magnets should be established so that all children have the real option to attend schools of their choice. (TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

ERIC Digest Series
Number EA 26 • 1988

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

MAGNET SCHOOLS

By Amy Klauke

ED293225

The demands of a rapidly changing society and increasing pressure for desegregation, coupled with a rise in absenteeism, dropout rates, and academic failure in traditional schools, has led to the creation of over 1,000 magnet schools in urban school districts across the country. In order to facilitate the transition to a multiracial community and meet the prevailing desire for academic excellence, magnets have adopted innovative educational practices as an enticement for voluntary integration.

What is distinctive about the policy and objectives of magnet schools?

Magnets meet racial quotas through voluntary enrollment and open access beyond established attendance zones. Emphasizing a special curricula or educational structure, they attract students and parents by creating supportive, personal environments while placing high expectations on student potential and progress.

Parents, students, and community members assess the needs of their school district and design a specific magnet program to serve these issues. Set up primarily to meet federal requirements for desegregation, magnets are also proving successful in serving the specific interests and abilities of a diverse student population.

What are some methods magnet schools use to meet these objectives?

To move from desegregation to integration, magnet schools often adopt cooperative learning activities, assign multiracial seating, and encourage small group discussion. Extracurricular activities and special projects provide opportunities for students to share diverse skills, and multicultural lessons are regularly introduced into the curricula. With an emphasis on mutual respect and appreciation, and an example of positive interracial relations set by the staff, a general atmosphere of trust and goodwill is nurtured among all members of the school community.

Evaluations are given for progress and effort as well as achievement, and may be written as comments rather than grades, thus diffusing competition, lessening the tendency to stereotype or create hierarchies among students, and avoiding the sense of failure those in the "bottom half" of traditional grading systems tend to feel. Instead, students are judged by their capacity to better their last performance and fulfill their own preestablished goals.

From individually guided education to back-to-basics techniques, magnets appeal to student interest across race, age, class, and achievement levels by offering challenging courses that focus on special themes, and by using approaches that match individual cognitive skills. Teachers have the opportunity to circulate in classes and attend to the specific learning needs of each student. Generally small and flexible, magnets change curriculum to meet student needs, and depend on a resourceful, dedicated staff and supportive community.

How are magnet schools making an impact?

Studies show that magnets improve minority achievement without hurting white achievement. Denis Doyle and Marsha Levine (1984) report that student attendance and participation are higher in magnet schools, as well as teacher satisfaction and parental control. Relations between diverse groups are generally harmonious. These results cause magnets to challenge the assumption that standardization is the most equitable system and to serve as pilots for effective educational change.

What are the liabilities of magnet schools?

Magnets have drawn criticism for several reasons. Mary Haywood Metz (1988) observes that beneath the American concept of standardized education lies the belief that public schools prove a testing ground for talent and ability, where the best necessarily rise to the top regardless of class, race, or sex. In fact, although materials and lessons may match, subtle forces such as atmosphere, expectation, and cultural differences play a major role in the success or failure rate among schools. Thus, more privileged families can choose to live near "better" schools. Magnets, by offering attractive alternatives and extending the privilege of choice to disadvantaged populations, draw fire as elitist

EA 020 211

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

institutions that challenge the myth of fairness in public school standardization.

Another charge is that of tokenism. Some claim that magnets' selection processes (which vary among districts) draw only the best students and teachers. Consequently, magnets, with the veneer of accomplishing desegregation, actually leave most minority students worse off than before, offering the district an excuse not to implement more fundamental changes.

Problems arise when teachers are nonvoluntary participants who must radically alter their style to suit the program. To establish and maintain magnet objectives, principals often need to play a stronger than usual role in shaping policy, a dynamic which can lead to teacher resentment and upset the crucial positive character of these programs. Because enrollment is voluntary and selective, magnets have also been accused of paying less heed to the suggestions of parents and students.

How can magnets meet their specific challenges?

Magnets must appear attractive but not elitist by appealing to interest rather than ability; diverse but not second-rate by providing sound criteria and objectives. They must develop in students the abilities both to work cooperatively with persons of different backgrounds and skills and to take responsiblity for their own progress in learning. Magnets must respond to constituent needs—welcoming continual parent, community, teacher, and student input in design and direction—and make special efforts to encourage participation by the most marginalized and disadvantaged populations.

Their innovative style should be guided, Metz (1986) advises, by leadership that is strong without disempowering its staff. To remain viable, magnets must not be seen as temporary or experimental, but must participate in a mutually beneficial relationship with the regular schools. They must locate in neutral neighborhoods and avoid situations that indirectly discriminate (by causing, for example, black students to bus farther than whites). To avoid tokenism, George Tsapatsaris (1985) recommends that an array of magnets should be established until all children have the real option to attend schools of their choice, and consistent long-term evaluation should be implemented to provide feedback on the effectiveness and future direction of each program.

RESOURCES

Bailey, Jerry D. RESEARCH NEEDED TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF MAGNET SCHOOLS. Washington, D.C: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1987. ED 284 952.

Blank, Rolf K. "Comparative Analysis of Local Planning and Development of Magnet Schools." In PLANNING AND DEVELOPING MAGNET SCHOOLS: EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS, edited by Rolf K. Blank and Paul R. Messier. Washington, D.C: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1987. ED 284 946 (individual paper, ED 284 954).

Clinchy, Evans. "Let Magnet Schools Guide the Way to Education Reform—And Diversity." AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARD JOURNAL 172, 5 (May 1985): 43. EJ 318 232.

Doyle, Denis P., and Marsha Levine. "Magnet Schools: Choice and Quality in Public Education." PHI DELTA KAPPAN 66, 4 (December 1984): 265-70. EJ 311 674.

Metz, Mary Haywood. "In Education, Magnets Attract Controversy." NEA TODAY 6, 6 (January 1988): 54-60.

Metz, Mary Haywood. DIFFERENT BY DESIGN: THE CONTEXT AND CHARACTER OF THREE MAGNET SCHOOLS. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul Inc., 1986. 267 pages. ED 271 455.

Raywid, Mary Anne. "Reflections on Understanding, Studying, and Managing Magnet Schools." In PLANNING AND DEVELOPING MAGNET SCHOOLS: EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS, edited by Rolf K. Blank and Paul R. Messier. Washington, D.C: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1987. ED 284 946 (individual paper, ED 284 955).

Tsapatsaris, George. "How We Magnetized a City School System. A Special Report on Magnet Schools." PRINCIPAL 64, 3 (January 1985): 8-10. EJ 323 565.

Turner, Benjamin F.. MAGNET SCHOOLS: A PLANNING GUIDE FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. Kent: Ohio Center for Educational Development and Strategic Services, Kent State University, June 1984. 22 pages. ED 244 043.

A Product of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management
College of Education, University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract No. OERI R-88-005. The ideas and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI, ED, or the Clearinghouse.